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ABSTRACT

Recently, Martin, Myers, and Mottet (1999) introduced a measure of motives students use when communicating with their instructors. The purpose of this study was to examine further students' motives for communicating with their instructors by considering both students' sociocommunicative orientation and instructors' socio-communicative style. Also of interest was whether men and women differ in their motives for communicating with their instructors. Subjects, 225 students enrolled in introductory communication courses, completed questionnaires. Students classified as competent communicators communicated more for the motives of relational, functional, excuse-making, and participation. Students classified as submissive communicators communicated more for the motive of sycophancy. Students reported communicating more frequently for functional purposes with teachers they perceived as having submissive and competent communicator styles. Male students reported communicating more for relational and sycophantic reasons while female students reported communicating more for functional reasons. Contains 39 references and 2 tables of data. (Author/RS)

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Running Head: Motives

Students' Motives for Communicating With Their Instructors III: Considering Socio-Communicative Orientation, Socio-Communicative Style, and Sex Differences

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CS 510 217

Abstract

Recently, Martin, Myers, and Mottet (1999) introduced a measure of motives students use when communicating with their instructors. The purpose of this study was to examine further students' motives for communicating with their instructors by considering both students' socio-communicative orientation and instructors' socio-communicative style. Also of interest was whether men and women differ in their motives for communicating with their instructors. Students classified as competent communicators communicated more for the motives of relational, functional, excuse-making, and participation. Students classified as submissive communicators communicated more for the motive of sycophancy. Students reported communicating more frequently for functional purposes with teachers they perceived as having submissive and competent communicator styles. Male students reported communicating more for relational and sycophantic reasons while female students reported communicating more for functional reasons.

Students' Motives for Communicating With Their Instructors III: Considering Socio-Communicative Orientation, Socio-Communicative Style, and Sex Differences

There is no disagreement with the proposition that communication variables impact the relationship and interactions between instructors and students. Instructor communication behaviors influence students in the areas of affective and cognitive learning (e.g., Christensen & Menzel, 1998; Richmond, 1990; Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987), motivation (e.g., Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Gorham & Millette, 1997), empowerment (e.g., Frymier, Shulman, & Houser, 1996), and involvement in classroom interaction (e.g., Booth-Butterfield, Moller, & Mollish, 1992). Additionally, it is generally through instructor communication behaviors that classroom uncertainty experienced by students is reduced (Prisbell, 1990).

A communication variable that has received recent attention in the instructional context is students' motives for communicating with their instructors. Based on the construct of interpersonal communication motives (Rubin, Perse, & Barbato, 1988), Martin, Myers, and Mottet (1999) argued that there are contextual motives that students have for communicating with their instructors. Students with different personalities would differ in why they communicate with their instructors. Additionally, they proposed that instructors' personalities and variables would influence why students choose to communicate. This study was interested in the relationship between instructors' and students' assertiveness and responsiveness with students' motives for communicating with their instructors. An additional interest was whether male and female students differ in these motives.

To reach this end, Martin, Myers, and Mottet (1999) introduced a measure of motives students use when communicating with their instructors. They identified five reasons: relational, functional, excuse-making, participation, and sycophancy. When students communicate in order to Relate, they are trying to develop personal relationships with their instructors. Communicating for Functional reasons includes learning more about the material and the assignments in the course. Students also communicate to offer Excuses; attempting to explain why work is late or missing. A fourth reason students give for communication is Participation. Students want to demonstrate to their instructors that they are interested in the class and they understand the material. The fifth reason is to get on the instructor's good side, also known as Sycophancy. Some students report that they communicate in order to make a favorable impression, communicating in a way that they know the instructor will approve.

Martin et al. (1999) found that students who communicated with their instructors more often in general communicated more with their instructors for relational reasons and to participate. The students who communicated for the interpersonal communication motive of control tended to communicate more in excuse making, participation, and sycophancy. Students' motivation about school was positively related to the communication reasons of relational, functional, and participation. Students' internal locus of control was positively related to the communication reason of functional, while negatively related to the reason of sycophancy.

In a second study, Martin, Mottet, and Myers (1999) refined their measure for students' motives for communicating. Specifically, new items were added for the participation and excuse motives, while all new items were identified for the sycophancy motive. Additionally, Martin et al. explored the relationship between the motives students use when communicating with their instructors and affective and cognitive learning. The relational, functional, and participation

motives were positively related to course affect and cognitive learning. The relational and functional motives were positively related to teacher affect and satisfaction. The motives of excuse-making and sycophancy were not related to either learning or satisfaction. Because student motivation to communicate is related with perceptions of instructor communication behaviors, it is plausible that student motivation to communicate will also be related to perceived instructor assertiveness and responsiveness.

Socio-Communicative Style: Assertiveness and Responsiveness

Two communication traits that influence how people communicate are assertiveness and responsiveness. Together, these variables comprise one's socio-communicative orientation or style (Richmond & Martin, 1998). Socio-communicative orientation is how one views one's own assertiveness and responsiveness, while socio-communicative style is an other-report of a person's assertiveness and responsiveness. Richmond and Martin argued that people communicate in part based not only on their own communicator style, but also on the communicator style of their intended target. In other words, students' communication with their instructors would be influenced by students' communicator style and the communicator style of their instructors.

Assertiveness refers to an individual's ability to make requests, to stand up for his or her rights, and to express himself or herself in ways that do not compromise the rights of others (Klopf, 1991; Richmond & McCroskey, 1995). Responsiveness is the manner in which an individual responds to others, which includes behaviors such as being understanding, being a good listener, being sympathetic, and exhibiting compassion (Klopf, 1991; Richmond & McCroskey, 1995). The notion of assertive behaviors has traditionally been equated with masculinity, whereas responsive behaviors have traditionally been equated with femininity (Bem,

1974; Richmond & McCroskey, 1995; Wheeless & Dierks-Stewart, 1981). Snavely (1981) noted that assertive individuals are considered to be extroverted and powerful whereas responsive individuals are considered to be trustworthier and more sociable. Lamke, Sallie, Durbin, and Fitzpatrick (1994), who found that assertiveness is associated with instrumental competence have supported these findings, and responsiveness is associated with expressive competence. People differ in how they communicate with others based on their assertiveness and responsiveness (Anderson & Martin, 1996; Martin & Anderson, 1996a; Martin, Chesebro, & Mottet, 1997; Richmond & McCroskey, 1995; Rocca, Martin, & Toale, in press).

Martin and Anderson (1996a) found that assertive communicators tended to be more argumentative while nonresponsive communicators tended to be more verbally aggressive. In using affinity-seeking strategies, those high in assertiveness were more likely to assume control while those high in responsiveness were more likely to show sensitivity (Patterson & Beckett, 1995). In studying the relationship between assertiveness and responsiveness with motives for communicating interpersonally, Anderson and Martin (1995) reported that those high in assertiveness communicate more for control, while those high in responsiveness and assertiveness communicate more for affection and inclusion.

In the classroom, Thomas, Richmond, and McCroskey (1994) investigated the relationship between assertiveness and responsiveness with nonverbal immediacy. Thomas et al. found both assertiveness and responsiveness to be positively correlated with immediacy, while the relationship between assertiveness and responsiveness was not significant. Wooten and McCroskey (1996) reported that students viewed assertive and responsive instructors with higher levels of trust. Martin, Chesebro, and Mottet (1997) studied the relationship between socio-communicative style and perceptions of credibility along with situational motivation. When

instructors were perceived as having the competent style (assertive and responsive), students perceived them as being higher in the credibility dimensions of competence, character, and caring and also expressed greater situational motivation. When instructors were perceived as having the aggressive style (assertive but not responsive), students perceived them as being low in character. When instructors were perceived as having the noncompetent style (neither assertive or responsive), students perceived them as being low in competence and caring, and also expressed less situational motivation.

Myers (in press) found that instructors who engaged in both assertiveness and responsiveness were perceived to be more argumentative than instructors who were neither assertive nor responsive. Instructors who were regarded to use neither assertive nor responsive behaviors were also viewed as being more verbally aggressive. Perceived instructor assertiveness and responsiveness have also been positively correlated with student learning (Robinson, 1993) and instructor clarity (Sidelinger & McCroskey, 1997). Given that students perceive their instructors' socio-communicate style and respond accordingly, it is probable that students will express different motives for communicating with their instructors based on their teachers' socio-communicate style. However, it is also possible that students' motives for communicating will be affected by perception of their own socio-communicative orientation. Wooten and McCroskey (1996) found, for example, that student perceptions of instructor trust were mediated by the degree of perceived similarity between student socio-communicative orientation and instructor socio-communicative style. Thus, the following two research questions were asked:

RQ 1: Do students with different Socio-Communicative Orientations differ in their reasons for communicating with their instructors?

RQ 2: Do students differ in their reasons for communicating with their instructors based on their instructors' Socio-Communicative Style?

Communication differences between the sexes have been noted in all levels of education including primary, secondary, and higher education (Bryant, 1991). Research suggests that teachers react to and treat the sexes differently (Bryant, 1991). The most significant difference is in the amount of attention that is paid to male students as compared to female students (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Specifically, when male students asked or answered questions, which they did eight times more than female students, their teachers were more likely to examine their ideas by asking additional follow-up questions. Other research suggests that males received more praise in the classroom and for different reasons. Male students were recognized and praised for making contributions and individually solving problems whereas female students received attention for cooperative behavior and for completing tasks in a quiet manner.

Unfortunately, sex differences in classroom communication do not dissipate as students enter college (Sandler, 1991). In fact, the same communication trends reported in primary and secondary education continue to be observed in higher education. In the college classroom, observational research reveals that male students talked longer than female students did and males made more declarative statements. In contrast, female students remained more tentative in their classroom communication. Sandler also suggests that both male and female professors called on male students more often, made more eye contact with male students, and responded more to male students' comments than female students. Professors have also been shown to interrupt female students more than male students.

Although Canary and House (1993) argued against studying gender as a variable in communication studies, researchers have established that motive usage differs between men and

women (Rubin et al., 1988). Women engaged in communication for emotionally expressive reasons whereas men communicated for instrumentally controlling reasons (Barbato & Perse, 1992). In addition, it has been documented that male and female students engaged in different communication behaviors in the classroom. Female students asked fewer questions in classes with male teachers (Constantinople, Cornelius, & Gray, 1988), were less assertive in asking questions (Pearson & West, 1991), and appeared less confident than male students (Crawford & MacLeod, 1990; Hall & Sandler, 1982). Male students participated more frequently in class, even when female students outnumbered them (Constantinople et al., 1988; Sternglantz & Lyberger-Ficek, 1977). These behaviors may be a function of motives they use when communicating with their instructors. To examine this further, the following research question is was asked:

RQ 3: Do male and female students differ in the reasons they give for communicating with their instructors?

Method

Participants

Participants were 225 students (105 women, 120 men) enrolled in introductory communication courses at a university in the Midwest. The mean age was 19.75 (SD = 2.04). Nearly half of the students in the sample were completing their first semester at the university level (freshman = 104, sophomore = 55, junior = 37, seniors = 26, other = 3). Participation in this study was voluntary.

Procedure

Near the end of the semester, students were instructed to complete a questionnaire that dealt with the course and the instructor that they had immediately before the class that they were

currently attending. The questionnaire included measures of students' and instructors' assertiveness and responsiveness, and motives for communicating with instructors.

Instruments

Motives for communicating with instructor was operationalized using the Martin, Mottet, and Myers (1999) 30-item measure. Students were asked to rate on a Likert-type scale, from exactly like me (5) to not at all like me (1) how each of the statements reflected their own reasons for talking to their instructors. A factor analysis of these 30 items produced a five factor solution, six items per factor, supporting the previous five factors presented by Martin et al.: Relational (M = 2.55, SD = .90, α = .88), Functional (M = 3.84, SD = .88, α = .87), Sycophancy (M = 2.46, SD = .98, α = .87), Excuse-making (M = 2.90, SD = 1.02, α = .84), and Participation (M = 2.73, SD = .98, α = .86).

Students' Socio-Communicative Orientation and instructors' Socio-Communicative Style were measured using the Assertiveness-Responsiveness Measure developed by Richmond and McCroskey (1990). This scale can be used to report one's own or another's communicator style. Students rated both themselves and their instructors on a seven-point Likert type scale: student responsiveness (M = 5.62, SD = .85, α = .91), student assertiveness (M = 5.31, SD = .83, α = .84), instructor responsiveness (M = 4.75, SD = 1.15, α = .93), and instructor assertiveness (M = 4.82, SD = 1.01, α = .86).

Results

To identify participants' Socio-Communicative Orientation, median splits were made for assertiveness (scores lower than 5.40 were considered low while scores higher than 5.41 were considered high) and responsiveness (scores lower than 5.70 were considered low while scores

higher than 5.71 were considered high). The scores were then used to classify individuals for each of the four styles: Noncompetents (n = 71), Submissives (n = 50), Aggressives (n = 47), and Competents (n = 57).

To identify instructors' Socio-Communicative Style, median splits were made for assertiveness (scores lower than 4.90 were considered low while scores higher than 4.91 were considered high) and responsiveness (scores lower than 4.80 were considered low while scores higher than 4.81 were considered high). The scores were then used to classify individuals for each of the four styles: Noncompetents (n = 80), Submissives (n = 39), Aggressives (n = 40), and Competents (n = 66). Research questions one and two were investigated by conducting a series of analyses of variance. Research question three was answered by conducting a series of tests of significant difference (t-tests).

Research Question One asked whether students with different Socio-Communicative Orientations differ in their reasons for communicating with their instructors. Results showed significant differences for all five motives. For the relational motive $F(2,221) = 5.32$, $p < .01$, competent students communicated more than submissives and aggressives, while noncompetents communicated more than submissives. For the functional $F(2,221) = 3.99$, $p < .01$, excuse-making $F(2,221) = 6.50$, $p < .01$, and participation motives $F(2,221) = 5.97$, $p < .01$, competents communicated more than the other three styles. For the sycophancy motive $F(2,221) = 5.14$, $p < .01$, submissives communicated more than the other three styles. Means for all of the Socio-Communicative Orientations are represented in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

Research Question Two asked whether students differ in their reasons for communicating with their instructors based on their instructors' Socio-Communicative Style. Results showed

only one significant difference, that for the motive of communicating for functional purposes $F(2,221) = 4.73$, $p < .01$. Students reported communicating more frequently for functional purposes with those teachers perceived as having submissive and competent styles versus those perceived as noncompetents. There were no significant differences for the relational $F(2,221) = 2.10$, $p > .05$, excuse-making $F(2,221) = 1.66$, $p > .05$, participation $F(2,221) = 1.42$, $p > .05$ or sycophancy motives $F(2,221) = .63$, $p > .05$. The Socio-Communicative Style means are represented in Table 2.

Table 2 about here

Research Question Three asked whether men and women differ in their motives for communicating with their instructors. Men communicated more for relational (women = 2.38, men = 2.70, t (223) -2.72, $p < .01$), and sycophancy motives (women = 2.22, men = 2.67, t (223) -3.50, $p < .001$). Women communicated more for the functional motive (women = 4.05, men = 3.65, t (223) 3.46, $p < .01$). There were no significant differences for the participation (women = 2.60, men = 2.84, t (223) -1.82, $p > .05$) and excuse-making motives (women = 2.93, men = 2.88, t (223) .40, $p > .05$).

Discussion

The first conclusion to be drawn from this study is that a student's socio-communicative style is related to the motives students use when communicating with their instructors. It appears that students who have an assertive orientation are motivated to talk to their instructors for all five motivations including relational, functional, participation, excuse-making, and sycophancy. This is not surprising since an assertive social style has been associated with instrumental competence (Lamke et al., 1994). In short, students whose social styles are more dominant,

independent, and competitive are motivated on multiple levels to accomplish tasks or objectives, and will communicate with their instructors in order to bring about the desired objectives.

Individuals with a responsive social style are other-oriented, focused on the relational dimension of relationships, and are reported to maintain liking in relationship while still reaching their own interpersonal goals (McCroskey & Richmond, 1996). In this study, students who have a responsive orientation are motivated to talk to their instructors for functional, participation, and excuse-making motives. The functional and participation motives seem consistent with students who want to develop and maintain relationships while pursuing interpersonal goals. Interestingly enough, the relational motive was not related to the responsive social style while the excuse motive was related. One interpretation for the relational motive not being related might be that in the instructional context, other-oriented responsive students perceive instructors as preferring to maintain personal and professional relationship boundaries. Responsive students' sensitivity to this perception, whether real or not, prevents them from communicating with their instructors to develop personal relationships. Instead they strive for professional relationships, which may be yielded by functional and participation motives.

Equally interesting was the excuse motive, which was related to students' responsive social styles. Similar to the explanation offered for the relational motive not being related to the responsive style, this motive appears consistent with an other-orientation. It seems plausible that responsive students would be motivated by excuse-making as a way to preserve a teacher-student relationship. Martin et al. (1999) describe this motive as a student who explains why work is late or missing. In order to preserve the professional relationship, responsive students are motivated to offer an excuse or additional information that explains student behavior that may be negatively perceived by the instructor.

When instructors are perceived as being assertive and responsive, students report communicating for relational and participation motives. Instructors are demonstrating a competent communicator style, possibly creating an instructional environment where students feel comfortable about interacting with each other and with the instructor. Students also reported communicating more for the functional motive when they perceived their instructors as being responsive. Responsiveness involves expressing caring. When instructors are perceived as being student oriented, students apparently feel more comfortable addressing instructors about the task functions of the course.

A third component of socio-communicative style that influences whether a person is effective and appropriate in achieving goals is flexibility (Richmond & Martin, 1998). Flexible communicators are able to adapt their communication (i.e., their assertiveness and responsiveness) depending on who they are interacting with and the constraints of the situation (Martin & Rubin, 1994; Martin, Anderson, & Thweatt, 1998). This study did not consider this component of socio-communicate style. Possibly student and instructor flexibility would also influence why students communicate with their instructors.

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Table 1

Socio-Communicative Orientation Means

	Relational	Functional	Excuse-making	Participation	Sycophancy
Noncompetent (n = 71)	2.59bc	3.66a	2.82a	2.65a	2.54a
Submissive (n = 50)	2.20a	3.80a	2.67a	2.45a	2.00b
Aggressive (n = 47)	2.49ab	3.75a	2.68a	2.60a	2.54a
Competent (n = 57)	2.87c	4.17b	3.40b	3.17	2.69a

Note. Means sharing the same subscript in a column do not differ from each significantly.

Table 2

Socio-Communicative Style Means

	Relational	Functional	Excuse-making	Participation	Sycophancy
Noncompetent (n = 80)	2.40a	3.58a	2.87a	2.86ab	2.53a
Submissive (n = 39)	2.59ab	4.08b	2.89a	2.89ab	2.47a
Aggressive (n = 40)	2.49ab	3.78ab	2.66a	2.66a	2.27a
Competent (n = 66)	2.76	4.05b	3.10a	3.10b	2.46a

Note. Means sharing the same subscript in a column do not differ from each significantly.